

**National Infant Immunization Week Urges Parents to Vaccinate  
United States Joins International Vaccination Effort  
One Million U.S. Children Not Adequately Immunized**

Contact: **(Name and telephone number)**

**For Immediate Release**

**(City, State)** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and **(local coalition)** will kick off National Infant Immunization Week (NIIW), April 25 through May 1, 2004, at **(time and location of events)** at **(location)**.

This year, CDC will for the first time join an unprecedented effort to promote immunization in all counties of the Americas. CDC will partner with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), the U.S./Mexico Border Health Commission and over 35 other nations during Vaccination Week in the Americas, which coincides with NIIW, to highlight the need for routine vaccinations, to improve immunization coverage levels and to promote access to health services.

“While immunization coverage among children in the United States is the highest ever recorded for most vaccines, we in the United States must not take our prevention successes for granted,” said **(Spokesperson, and title)**. “We are all citizens of the world community. Over a million people a day cross international borders and a border is not a boundary to disease. It is vital to our nation’s health that we work across borders to eliminate disease.”

Vaccines are among the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death. High immunization coverage levels translate into record or near record low levels of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Each day 11,000 babies are born who will need to be immunized against twelve diseases before age two. Despite recent gains in childhood immunization coverage, more than 20% of the nation’s two year olds are still missing one or more of the recommended immunizations. Infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to infectious diseases; that is why it is critical that they are protected through immunization.

“Immunizations are one of the most important ways parents can protect their children against serious diseases. Although immunization coverage among children in the United States is the highest ever recorded for most vaccines, one million of our nation’s children are still not fully immunized,” said **(Spokesperson)**.

Disease causing viruses and bacteria are still circulating, either at low levels in the United States or elsewhere in the world. For example, each year the United States is hit with multiple importations of measles. Measles is no longer circulating in the United States, but the virus is frequently imported from outside this country. If vaccination coverage levels drop, it is likely we will see a resurgence of measles. In 1989, the United States was hit with a measles epidemic resulting in 55,000 cases of measles, 11,000 hospitalizations, and more than 120 deaths between 1989 and 1991.

“Today, there are far fewer visible reminders of the unnecessary suffering, injuries, and premature deaths caused by vaccine-preventable diseases. Most of today’s parents have never seen these diseases and the suffering they can cause and, therefore, are less concerned about the need for immunization compared to other parental priorities,” said **(Spokesperson)**.

NIIW is an annual observance that emphasizes the need to fully immunize children age two and younger against 12 vaccine-preventable diseases. More than 400 events are taking place across the United States to celebrate NIIW. In addition, hundreds of activities are happening throughout the Americas as part Vaccination Week in the Americas. This year's NIIW theme is “Vaccination: an act of love. Love Them. Protect them. Immunize Them.”

To support NIIW, The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and CDC has produced a 30-second Spanish-language public service announcement (PSA) and an English-language PSA entitled, “*I Promise,*” and features adults promising to vaccinate their children on time, every time. Both PSAs will be linked via satellite to major markets throughout the nation and will first air during NIIW and then continue airing through March 2005. Both stress the importance of vaccinating children in the first 24 months of life to protect them against vaccine-preventable diseases. The PSAs provide parents with visual and audio cues to reinforce the childhood recommended vaccination schedule: at birth, 2, 4, 6, 12 and 15 months.